

**WASHINGTON STATE RAINBOW COALITION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON**

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

**RICK HARWOOD OF WASHINGTON STATE RAINBOW COALITION**

**INTERVIEWEE:** RICK HARWOOD

**INTERVIEWER:** SAUL GONZALEZ

**SUBJECTS:** WASHINGTON STATE RAINBOW COALITION, NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION, JESSE JACKSON, DEMOCRATIC PARTY, ANTI-VIETNAM WAR MOVEMENT, CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, ANTI-IMPERIALISM, ANTI-RACISM, ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT, ANTI-SEXISM, NATIONAL ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZING COMMITTEE, DEMOCRATIC PARTY DELEGATES, ELECTORAL POLITICS, MULTIRACIAL COALITION, REPRESENTATION, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, EL CENTRO DE LA RAZA, COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, LGBTQ COMMUNITY, CHARLES ROLLAND, SEATAC CITY COUNCIL, PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS

**LOCATION:** REMOTE INTERVIEW VIA ZOOM

**DATE:** MAY 23, 2024

**INTERVIEW LENGTH:** 01:09:12

**FILE NAME:** HarwoodRick\_WSRCOHP\_2024\_Video.mp4

*The Labor Archives of Washington is committed to preserving the voices and stories of individuals who have contributed to the labor movement's rich history. The LAW presents oral history interviews as part of its contribution to helping curate and create access to a broad and inclusive historical record. These interviews contain the personal recollections and opinions of the individuals involved and, therefore, may contain language, ideas or stereotypes that are offensive or harmful to others.*

*Individual oral histories cannot serve as the sole source of historical information about an institution or event. These narratives do not represent the views of the Labor Archives of Washington, Libraries Special Collections, or the University of Washington, past or present.*

SAUL 00:00:11

Okay, so what is your name? Can you spell out your first and last name?

RICK 00:00:16

Okay, my name is Rick Harwood. It's R-I-C-K H-A-R-W-O-O-D.

SAUL 00:00:26

Awesome. How old are you and where were you born?

RICK 00:00:30

I'm 71 and three quarters years old, and I was born in New York City.

SAUL 00:00:40

And what gender if any, do you identify with? What are your pronouns?

RICK 00:00:44

I'm a male, and I go by he/him.

SAUL 00:00:50

And then what race or ethnicity do you identify as?

RICK 00:00:54

Caucasian

SAUL 00:00:58

All right, so what was your life prior to joining the Rainbow Coalition? Did you grow up in Washington state, or did you move here? When and why?

RICK 00:01:08

I grew up in New York, in the suburbs of New York City, went to high school, lived there with my family through high school, spent my first year of college at Columbia University in New York City in 1970-71. And then I transferred from there to Antioch College in Ohio, Yellow Springs, Ohio, and attended college there for the three remaining years and graduated from college there. And upon graduation, I moved to Seattle. And the reason I moved to Seattle at that time was I had been in Seattle. Antioch College has a work study component, so you study for usually two semesters or two quarters or three quarters out of the year, and then one or two quarters out of each year, you're off campus doing internships. And I did one of my internships in Seattle. I majored in elementary education. I did one of my internships here in Seattle in 1973 and really liked this part of the country, and I liked that there was a lot of young people and a youth movement kind of thing going on here at the time. And so when I graduated from college, I moved to Seattle to live and to seek employment as a high school--or actually at that time, I was planning to be an elementary school teacher. So I moved here in 1974 after graduating from high school, or college, I'm sorry.

SAUL 00:01:39

Were you involved in electoral politics prior to the Jesse Jackson campaign?

RICK 00:03:00

Yeah, I was. And actually, when I was growing up, I was the oldest of four children. My parents were active in the Democratic Party in Nassau County on Long Island in New York State. My father when I was in fourth grade, I think, or sixth grade, was elected to the New York State Legislature as a democratic, what they call there an assemblyman state representative, and he served in the state legislature for ten years. During that time I was growing up, it was Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement were growing and and becoming very active. So my last couple of years of high school, I got more politically involved, mostly in protest politics against the Vietnam War, primarily. But because of my my parents' involvement in electoral politics, I learned a lot about how electoral politics works and how state government works. And so I was not particularly supportive of that form of political activism myself as a young person, but knew enough about it to help inform some of the things I was doing in high school and in college.

When I was in college, I continued to be active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, more so in the one year I was in New York City than three years I was in college in Ohio, although there was a major US Air Force Base just a few miles from where I went to college. So we did--I was involved in regular protests outside the gates of the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. And then when I moved to Seattle in 1974, in the summer of 1974, I continued to be involved to some extent, although at that point, the Vietnam War was--the US involvement and primary responsibility for the Vietnam War was coming to an end, largely due to the anti-war movement that had been going on for at least six or eight years leading up to 1974.

And then, so after I moved to Seattle, I was here for a little while, then I started getting involved in international liberation solidarity movements. There were groups of activists in the Seattle area working on Central America solidarity for liberation movements like in Nicaragua and El Salvador. I got involved in that and then through that work, I eventually became a part of a group that did a lot of work, a lot of anti-racist organizing in Seattle.

There was one organization that I was a part of for a number of years called the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee. The Ku Klux Klan was active in the state of Washington and the state of Idaho, mostly Eastern Washington, but active and present, and that organization that I became a part of did a lot of organizing and educational work about the existence of the Ku Klux Klan and another white supremacist right wing organization, the name of which I just forgot, but that was organized primarily in Idaho. So we did a lot of work just to inform people about the existence and the threat that those organizations posed, and did some counter protests. I didn't especially get involved and that group that I was a part of didn't do much in terms of electoral politics, other than to try to lobby elected officials to take stands against the racist white supremacist organizations, and also to get elected officials, Congress people, in particular, to get the US to end its support of fascist dictatorships in the Philippines and in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

And also at that point, we started to get involved in the anti-apartheid in South Africa work, and that became a focus of the work that that group, the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee, did. There became a Seattle anti apartheid network that developed in the late 1970's and throughout the 80's, that did protests and divestment campaigns, where we lobbied the state investment fund and University of Washington system and state Congress and state legislators to divest from investments and companies and corporations doing business in South Africa. And we did weekly protests, there was a South African consul who conducted business out of his house in Madison Park neighborhood, and we did weekly picket lines and protests and civil disobedience in front of his house every Sunday.

So as a part of that work and through all of that basically anti-racist, anti imperialist, pro-liberation work that I was a part of, we interacted with elected officials and candidates running for office throughout the late 70's and 80's. And that really laid the foundation for, I think, for the work that I was involved in, and a lot of other people were involved in, to be involved in electoral politics and to be involved in the formation of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition in 1984.

SAUL 00:10:02

Yeah, so about that. When did you join the Rainbow Coalition, which you talked a little bit about, and what was the Rainbow doing at that time that made you want to join?

RICK 00:10:12

Well, I was part of the group of people that helped start the Rainbow Coalition, and like I said, it came out of other work that I was involved in, and a lot of other progressive young people and people of color were involved in, in the Seattle area and across the state of Washington also. And you know, focusing on, like I said,

anti-apartheid work related to South Africa and pro-liberation, pro-democracy, anti-fascist dictatorship, organizing and civil rights activism in the Seattle area and connecting with other groups doing similar work in other parts of the state of Washington and peripherally and somewhat involved in electoral politics.

And in 1984 when Reverend Jesse Jackson announced that he was going to run for president, the group of activists that I was a part of saw that as an important opportunity to get involved in his campaign and support his campaign and establish an organization in the state of Washington to support his campaign, because his progressive, pro-democracy, anti-racist politics that were the foundation of his candidacy for presidency were in line with the work that we had been doing. And so I was a part of a group of activists, a multi racial group of activists, some of whom were already involved in Democratic Party electoral politics in the state of Washington, and some of whom hadn't yet gotten into those structures, but we formed the Washington State Rainbow Coalition early in 1984 to support Jesse Jackson's campaign for presidency, and stayed as an organization through that campaign, got involved in electoral politics with other candidates running for office in the state of Washington, found our own candidates to run for some of the offices, and then continued through and were part of the Jesse Jackson 1988 campaign for president.

SAUL 00:12:45

Yeah. So what role or roles did you play, yourself, in the Washington State Rainbow Coalition, and what kind of activities were going on while you were involved?

RICK 00:12:57

Okay, well, I was part of a group of people that were strategizing what were the best ways to get Jesse Jackson's message, his political left, progressive, anti-racist, unity-building message out to the voters in the state of Washington in both the '84 and '88 campaign. And the state of Washington was one of the states in the United States that did precinct caucuses to elect delegates to look to the congressional district, the state candidate conventions, and the national convention for the Democratic Party. So we got involved in the Democratic Party where we lived. So I joined the 37th Legislative District Democratic Party, as did a lot of us, wherever we lived in our district, Democratic Party organizations. We got ourselves well versed in the process of getting people to run for precinct in the precinct caucuses representing Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign and also the process that was a stage, you know, three or four stage process of getting delegates who were committed to Jesse Jackson for president, elected at every level up to the state convention, and then ultimately to the National Democratic Party Convention.

So, in 1984 campaign, I was one of the people that was helping organize the running of candidates, people who were part of their precincts and their legislative districts to come to those meetings, those conventions, and declare that they supported Jesse Jackson. That's how votes were counted, and then run for delegate representing Jesse Jackson, from the precinct, the legislative district, to the congressional district, to the state convention, and then ultimately to the Democratic National Convention. So in '84 we kind of laid the groundwork, and we learned the system, and we got people elected as delegates, and we also did a lot of organizing to spread the political message and the political platform that the Rainbow Coalition and the Jesse Jackson campaign we're running on. So I worked on that. We were part of the platform committee for the Democratic Party at the legislative district and at the state conventions in '84.

In 1988, we were a lot more effective because we had the next three years to build the Washington State Rainbow Coalition, get more involved in state Democratic Party and legislative district and congressional district Democratic Party organizations, get ourselves positioned to run those organizations and get elected to offices within those Democratic Party structures, primarily for the purpose of promoting the progressive politics of the Rainbow Coalition.

And in the course of doing that, we built an unprecedented, I guess, multiracial organization. Prior to that, there was limited participation by the Black community in the Seattle area and statewide by communities of color in electoral politics, just because of the disenfranchisement and the lack of effort to recruit and even to promote politics that meant something to people of color. And so the Rainbow Coalition's politics mobilized a lot of people of color and across the state to get involved. And so we had a multiracial coalition of activists, all ages, male and female, young and old, working to promote those politics within the Democratic Party.

In 1988, we went even further, and we--well, for one thing, we were able to get almost a majority of the delegates, so we were about somewhere between 45 and 48% of the voters in precinct caucuses and legislative district, congressional district conventions supporting Jesse Jackson's presidency. So we had about 45% of the state delegates to the National Convention in 1988 committed to Jesse Jackson for president, which for a state like Washington state, with a less than 15% statewide population of people of color, was a success that made a big impression, a big impact on Democratic Party politics in the state.

And we also had people, myself included, working on developing the state Democratic Party platform. So we had people in meetings. We had people in writing platform positions on issues related to local, domestic, economic, workers rights, anti-racist issues, as well as solidarity with, for example, the rights of the Palestinian people for freedom and democracy in the Middle East and in Palestine, and just a number of other pro-democracy and anti-imperialist positions in the state Democratic Party platform. And we struggled. We brought those to the National Rainbow Coalition and had some struggles. There was national support for a lot of the platform positions, and a lot of what we were putting in our platform in the state of Washington were consistent with what was being promoted at the national level. But there was some struggle within the Rainbow to keep those politics in there, despite opposition from the establishment Democratic Party. So that was one of the things I worked on, was developing the Washington state Democratic Party platform, so that it had progressive politics coming from the Rainbow Coalition, among other things.

And I didn't run to be a delegate for the Democratic Party to the national convention. I was more like a staff person, but I helped support and get other people elected to those delegate positions. And then I went with a delegation from the state of Washington to the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1988. And there were a group of us who had worked on the platform in Washington state that were part of Jesse Jackson's National Platform Committee at the national convention in Atlanta in 1988.

SAUL 00:20:31

Yeah, I wanted to expand on a point that you made. What communities did the Rainbow organize in, what were the demographics of the Washington State Rainbow, and how did it approach race, gender, and sexuality, and how does that impact the organizing that went on in the Rainbow?

RICK 00:20:31

Well, we were definitely focusing on communities of color across the state of Washington. So the Black community, Latino community, Asian community, Native American community, those were the primary targets of our organizing efforts. And there were people from all of those communities that were in leadership positions in the Washington State Rainbow Coalition leading that work. It was, you know, a multiracial organization with multiracial leadership.

We went to, you know, we went well beyond the Democratic Party institutions to community groups, churches, cultural organizations, political organizations. You know, the Washington State branch of the United Farm Workers was one of the groups that we worked with, and it was part of the Rainbow Coalition. There were the

NAACP and the Urban League, and there was an anti-Marcos dictatorship, active organization in Seattle for many years before the mid-80's, and that people from that organization were in leadership roles in the Washington State Rainbow Coalition. We worked with organizations from all those communities in other parts of the state, from Olympia to Bellingham, and east to Yakima and Spokane, and all across the state, to build and mobilize leadership in those, you know, multiracial leadership, but also to build and mobilize grassroots from those communities to get actively involved.

And our politics--and our organization was led by women as much or more than men throughout that whole effort. So it was gender, you know, balanced and we also--the gay and lesbian community was actively involved in leadership roles and our politics that we promoted in the platform for the Democratic Party included representing issues from all of those communities in the issues positions on issues that we put forward and promoted in the Democratic Party.

SAUL 00:23:30

Awesome. Can you talk a little bit about how the Washington State Rainbow was structured, how decisions were made and how new members were recruited, or new chapters formed?

RICK 00:23:40

Good question, and you're definitely challenging my memory. But I mean, you know, we definitely were recruiting and looking to bring in people, especially people who had historically been disenfranchised and did not feel represented and so did not engage in electoral politics, and to a large extent, didn't actively engage in issue-oriented politics, because they didn't see a place for themselves. And typically that was communities of color who didn't feel that their voices were being listened to, or that they were supported, or that they were even welcomed into active political, especially electoral political activism.

But the issues that the Jesse Jackson campaign raised and that we all were part of developing were really what brought people into the Rainbow Coalition and into the movement that, you know, that was kind of identified with the Jesse Jackson campaign. So taking progressive positions that represented people of color and working people and women and gay and lesbian people across the state, who had historically been underrepresented or disenfranchised or obstructed from being involved in electoral politics, drew them out and it drew them into that movement. The voter turnout was higher, the participation the diversity that reflected the diversity of the state of Washington was much greater. And it really all came down to the politics that the Rainbow Coalition was promoting that represented the interests not of just the white, you know, white male empowered political leadership, but people who had historically been left out and not represented. And so we constantly were promoting progressive politics, knowing that that was obviously the most important thing and the reason we were doing the work we were doing, but also knowing that it would speak to people who had felt like traditional electoral politics didn't speak for them or represent them. So that was the basis for how we engaged people.

And then we just, we did things, you know, we worked with community organizations, and we were parts of community organizations all around the state that were already in existence and struggling for issues and for rights of people in their activist ways that weren't necessarily accepted or included in electoral politics. Those were the targets of our recruitment efforts and our outreach efforts and our building coalitions with already existing activist organizations that were already taking on those issues. So the Rainbow Coalition was truly a coalition of individuals and organizations across the state of Washington.

We had to go to all those places and meet in person. There was no such thing as what we're doing right now, internet, emails, Zoom calls. It was telephones and mail, letter writing and sending documents to each other and going in person, traveling all around the state. You know, we made a point of holding meetings, not just in

Seattle, we tried to be, you know, very conscious of the Seattle-centric tradition of political organizing. And we went out to other parts of the state, and we held meetings and gatherings and conferences and conventions around the state.

We had--I don't remember exactly the specific ways that we developed our structure, but in most cases, we made decisions by consensus. So we developed some rules of operation that were unique to our organizing, and were not part of the state structures like the Democratic Party, but we strove to reach consensus on our political positions and not just do, you know, the majority rules kind of decision making. And we did have regular coalition meetings, and we tried to do them all around the state. We had our own statewide convention every year to bring people, representatives, or anybody who could come to wherever we held those conventions around the state to be a part of our organizing effort.

SAUL 00:28:54

And so what challenges, if any, did the Washington State Rainbow Coalition face?

RICK 00:29:07

Oh, there were plenty of challenges. I mean, typical of human nature and politics in general is there were some struggles for, I don't know, control of leadership, or, you know, some struggles around, you know, who should have more responsibility and more authority. And there was a hierarchy, you know, that was part of people's experience, whatever organization or institution we were part of, and so we really had to struggle against, you know, hierarchy where some people had more power and more voice and others didn't.

And certainly we had to deal with issues of gender equity and not having men running everything, as was typical. And that wasn't like it was a hard thing to do, because there were plenty of activists, men and women, smart and capable and strong and smart and with leadership skills and with a willingness to be collaborative and inclusive. But it was, you know, it was just overcoming historical past practices that were oftentimes not fully inclusionary to make sure we weren't just following a traditional model of hierarchical and male dominated and white male dominated politics. So that was something we had to keep ourselves aware of, and wasn't hard to do that because we were always, you know, there were always very strong people from all different communities, male and female. So I guess that was one challenge.

It was, I guess, to some extent a challenge to convince some people who just didn't have confidence that we could change electoral politics to be more representative and more inclusive. So it just took, you know, constant vigilance and constant outreach and effort and trying to draw people in and, you know, get people to take on roles and responsibility, and feel as though they had some ability to lead and influence the work that we were doing, and not just have the work done to them or for them. And you know, ultimately, the rules and the structures of electoral politics and of the Democratic Party were things that we couldn't change overnight, and we had to figure out how to function within and manipulate, you know, for our purposes, to promote our progressive politics and keep people involved in the struggle and help them to not be discouraged or or feel like they weren't going to be able to make some kind of progress in the process.

SAUL 00:32:36

Can you talk a little bit about the Rainbow Coalition's relationship with El Centro de la Raza?

RICK 00:32:44

Well, that's a complicated issue, and to some extent, it's hard to even remember all the details. But there definitely were some struggles around who is going to be in leadership, and how those things were going to be decided, and who is going to prove that they were more loyal or more important, or more valuable or better

connected with Jesse Jackson and his circle of leadership at the national level. And so to some extent, there were struggles and challenges and battles that came up and disagreements that came up between El Centro and other parts and other people and other groups and other activists that weren't part of El Centro but were all part of the Rainbow Coalition.

And at times it became a struggle for, you know, certain people wanting more power and be seen as--this is at least my perspective and my recollection--certain people wanted to be seen as the leaders and the decision makers to the exclusion of others and that was part of the struggle that I feel like we had to engage in, was to not have it be one organization or one group or one handful of activists and leaders in the Seattle area that wanted to be seen as the leaders of the Rainbow Coalition and the closest allies to Jesse Jackson, because we were all working towards the same political goals and attempting to achieve the same results of broadening who electoral politics truly represents and who it truly allows to be participants, and we didn't--so yeah, there was a struggle around who were the true leaders that were running the Rainbow Coalition in the state of Washington.

And it ultimately came down to a challenge that went to Jesse Jackson himself, and to Jesse Jackson's closest historic allies and those of us who had been actively organizing the Rainbow Coalition at the grassroots and issue related level for four years leading up to the '88 campaign, just stood up and said, "No, it can't be just these people who say they're the leaders and they're the most important. It has to be determined by the people that are part of the work and part of the organization." And it ultimately came down to we're going to stay with the structures we have, and we're going to choose the leaders that we have based on the work that they're doing, and not based on what their sense of their own self-importance is. So I guess that's how I would describe the struggle with El Centro, I think

SAUL 00:36:10

And what's your understanding of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition's mission? Did it coincide with the National Rainbow Coalition's mission? And then the Rainbow Coalition has a strategy of inside/outside, and what did that mean? What do you think of that strategy?

RICK 00:36:28

Well, I think that generally and philosophically and politically, excuse me, the Washington State Rainbow Coalition was consistent with what the National Rainbow Coalition was in existence to do and to accomplish. And I would say that there were groups--I don't know to a great degree what was going on in a lot of the other states, but I know in Washington state, we were very well-organized, and we were very focused and very clear, and clear in expressing outside of our organizing work, outside of the most active people who were part of the organizational structure of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition, what our intent and what our purpose was, which was to influence electoral politics and to influence Democratic Party politics, in particular, with progressive positions on issues, you know, representing working people, people of color, progressive people, like I said earlier, and promote those issues and also to support people struggling for democracy and liberation around the world who were impacted by US imperialism. And that was consistent for the most part, you know, with some occasional specific issues that we had to struggle over with, what the Rainbow Coalition nationally was doing, and what they were espousing in their political organizing nationally.

And inside and outside meant that we were working within the structures of the Democratic Party primarily. I mean, we certainly weren't going to try to attempt to influence the Republican Party. And it was then, as it is now, primarily a two party system, and we knew that the Democratic Party was the more logical, more realistic place for us to be. So we worked within the Democratic Party to change the rules and open up the structures of the Democratic Party to make it a more inclusive major political party that allowed, or not just allowed for, but made it easy for and meaningful for people who had historically been disenfranchised, excluded from electoral



politics, to be a part of electoral politics and to be a part of the Democratic Party structures. And doing that, not just by changing the rules and changing the structures, but by reaching out to, as I said before, communities that had historically been disenfranchised to become a part of the Democratic Party because of this effort to promote progressive politics that represented their interests and didn't exclude them and their interests from what the party was promoting.

But we also did a lot of organizing outside of the Democratic Party to promote those issues, and to promote them in the most progressive ways possible, and in some cases, on positions that weren't necessarily going to be acceptable to or adopted by the Democratic Party itself. So, you know, we talked about being anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist and, you know, pro the rights of people who, I would say, particularly the gay and lesbian community, whose struggles and challenges were definitely not taken up by traditional Democratic Party organizations; in addition to communities of color and the issues of those communities, as well. So the outside organizing was to help build a movement that gave people, who were progressive activists or who were concerned about issues to see the value, at least at that time, that historical period of time, to be involved within the structures of electoral politics, in the Democratic Party, despite the history of exclusion, while promoting progressive politics outside of those structures. So that was kind of one way of looking at the inside-outside.

We put from our corner of the of the country put our pressures on the National Rainbow Coalition to to hold positions and to be more inclusive and had some struggles and I'd say the bigger challenges came after the '88 presidential campaign, when the thinking and the decision making around whether or not to stay involved in Democratic Party electoral politics was being addressed, and whether or not we were going to have a national-level presidential candidate like Jesse Jackson in the following electoral cycle in '92, but between '88 and '92, what we were going to do within electoral politics.

We here in this state made some gains and saw some opportunities that made us want to continue to be involved in electoral politics. We had people getting elected to the state legislature, people of color never before being elected to positions in the state legislature. The Washington State Rainbow Coalition chairperson, Charles Rolland was elected to be the chair of the state Democratic Party in, I guess it was 1990, it was right after the presidential campaign. And that was because of our work and our organizing and our pushing on the traditional establishment leadership of the Democratic Party to be more inclusive. And Charles Rolland was elected by the statewide chair of the Democratic Party, which opened up some opportunities for progressives and people of color to influence even further the inclusiveness of the Democratic Party in the state of Washington. But after the--I may be getting into a question you're going to ask me later, but things started to change at the national level after '88 that made it more challenging for us to continue to do our work here in the state of Washington.

SAUL 00:43:25

Yeah, can you actually expand on after '88 and the decisions that you guys made during those years, and how that impacted that period until '92 and after '92?

RICK 00:43:41

Yeah well, you know, honestly, I think we never really--we did some work to try to analyze some of that. And I don't--well anyway, I think we as the Washington State Rainbow Coalition continued to stay together as an organization statewide, with people around the state continuing to do organizing in various areas around the state, within the Democratic Party and outside of the Democratic Party, around the progressive political issues that we had always focused on, and new and current ones as they came up.

We definitely continued to support and look for our own candidates to run for office, from city and county-wide offices around the state, to state legislative, to congressional, and to US Senate candidacies and governor

candidacies. Mike Lowry was the governor of state of Washington, and he would come to Rainbow Coalition meetings, and he was supportive of our efforts to expand the base and membership and participation in the Democratic Party. And we had congress people who we were working with, but a lot more at the grassroots and local level, we were electing people to offices who were, you know, part of the Rainbow Coalition. And like I said few minutes ago, we elected Charles Rolland as the statewide chair of the Democratic Party, which his primary primary goal was to continue to try to make the Democratic Party more inclusive and more open and more accessible to a broader range of communities than historically it had been, across the state.

At the national level, Jesse Jackson, for whatever reason, decided not to, but he just--I guess he decided that his personal political future had greater potential attempting to be part of the mainstream Democratic Party, rather than continuing to support the building of the National Rainbow Coalition. So he kind of backed off on that focus of really continuing to build and develop the National Rainbow Coalition. Maybe he knew at that point that he wasn't going to run for president or attempt to run for president for a third time. But he did not continue to be a leader that promoted the continuation of the Rainbow Coalition. He kind of went back to his organization based in Chicago, Operation PUSH.

For a lot of us, it seemed like it was a self-serving and opportunistic choice on his part, because we were, you know, around the country, we were continuing to push on him as an individual and at the National Rainbow Coalition as an organization, to take more and more progressive positions on the most important issues of the day, and some of those he wasn't willing to do. And so I think he ultimately saw it as something that he couldn't control the way he could as a candidate for presidency and backed off. And we lost his voice, which there's no denying that his national presence and his national performance, his ability to articulate progressive politics in a way that made sense to a broad range of people, working people, people of color and white people, was more effective than anybody else around at the time. And so, we weren't going to engage in a struggle for leadership with him, and he basically, I guess, undercut that whole possibility by just not continuing to be the voice of and the face of the National Rainbow Coalition. And so it started to just gradually fall apart at the national level.

Washington State Rainbow Coalition continued to exist for, I think, four more years, and we continued to participate in electoral politics. And the interesting thing was that we were recognized in the state of Washington, at least as a formidable organizing force, especially in the electoral political arena, and candidates for office. We still had a structure, and we actually had a committee that interviewed candidates for office who wanted the endorsement of their campaigns from the Washington State Rainbow Coalition. So we had meetings, we had questionnaires we sent out to candidates, and we made recommendations to our membership on endorsements and who to vote for. Or at least in some cases, we didn't make any recommendations, because the candidates who were running for office weren't candidates that we could support. We used that as a way to inform statewide our members and followers and allies about what candidates we could identify were best representing the progressive political interests of the people that were under the umbrella of the Rainbow Coalition.

But we became pretty much an independent, functioning organization, not part of a national organization anymore, after about 1992 or so. And people continue to stay involved from the Rainbow Coalition in their state legislative Democratic Party organizations, and some are still to this day, and a lot of people got elected to office who either were or would have been active in the Rainbow Coalition following the '88 campaign.

SAUL 00:50:38

Awesome. So can you talk a little bit about the resignation of President Imogene Bowen in 1995 and the impact it had on the organization or on yourself?

RICK 00:50:51

Well, that's interesting, because I don't really recall the specifics or the details of what happened with their her resignation. She was a significant leader in our organization as a statewide Rainbow Coalition organization, a highly effective, articulate, very dedicated and focused Native American woman who was respected. So I don't remember, honestly, the struggle that may or may not have occurred with Imogene, and what, if anything that had to do with her resignation as the Rainbow state president. So I'm sorry I can't really answer that question.

SAUL 00:51:50

All right, and if you decided to leave the organization, when and why?

RICK 00:51:59

Well, I don't think I ever decided to leave the organization. The organization just kind of disintegrated, fell away. I mean, I continued to remain active in political organizing, and a number of the issues that we were a part of, or that was part of the Rainbow, after the '90s and to this day. I was active in in the 37th Legislative District, which was where I lived in the South Seattle area, in that Democratic Party organization for a couple of years afterwards, and I supported the election to the chair position of that organization of Alex Stevens at the time and others following him who were leading, for the chair of the party for that district and were continuing to be active in the state party.

But I personally chose to focus more on on issue-oriented politics. I mean, I worked on political campaigns for candidates for city council and county council, but I also was--my personal work that I was involved in as a public school teacher and eventually a public school administrator took a lot of my time and took me away from being able to do as much in electoral politics as I'd been doing In the 80's and early 90's. But I still felt then, and I still to this day feel that that inside/outside approach to political activism is still important. It's harder to really feel effective without an organization like the Rainbow Coalition to be a part of. But there are plenty of progressive activists working within electoral politics and outside of electoral politics who I am still in a coalition and organizations with and and still politically active with.

So I personally, you know--and I said my early history was that I grew up in a household where my parents were politically active, and my father was an elected official. My mother would have been, but in those days, it was mostly men, so she was the brains behind the operation of my father's political career. But also on a personal level, just because of seeing how that whole process worked, I was never particularly interested myself in running for elective office. And also being a white male, I didn't feel like that I was needed in that role. I was much more interested in supporting people who historically and traditionally wouldn't be elected to office, to help get women of color, women, men of color, gay and lesbian candidates, elected to office, and to use my skill and my knowledge to help other people, other than white males get elected to elected office. So I've worked on campaigns over the years.

I'd say the most recent thing that I've been involved in that's an outgrowth I believe of the work that I did in the Rainbow Coalition and that I learned from as a result of my work in the Rainbow Coalition, is that the last ten years of my career in education, I was in the Highline School District, which is the area around the SeaTac airport. So SeaTac, White Center, Burien, and Des Moines, which is a district that's about 35,000 students, maybe less than that, but it's predominantly a low-income, people of color school district. But the political institutions, like, for example, I was principal of high school and SeaTac, and the City Council of SeaTac had been white and male for most of its existence as a city, which was dated back to the early 1990's. And when I finally retired, I became part of a group that called ourselves the SeaTac Neighborhood Action Council, was as a result of Trump getting elected president and a couple of Trump supporters getting elected to the SeaTac City Council. And we, over the next four years, worked to build involvement by immigrant families and families of

color within the SeaTac community in electoral politics, getting people registered to vote, getting people actively aware of issues, and we had candidates who were part of our effort, who were people of color. It took us a couple of years of organizing, but we got people elected to the city council, and now that city council in the city of SeaTac is majority progressive activists who are leading the city in a direction that's more representative of the multiracial makeup of the SeaTac community.

So for myself personally, and for a lot of the people that I still am associated with from the Rainbow Coalition, that's the work that we do now. We work for candidates, we work for campaigns, we work within institutions, small, local, and district-wide and statewide, to get progressive candidates elected to office, to represent people that are traditionally under or not represented, and typically people of color and low income people and people from communities that are just historically disenfranchised. So that's where the Rainbow Coalition work of the 80's and early 90's led me to, to this day.

SAUL 00:58:39

Awesome. And in your opinion, what led to the fizzling out of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition?

RICK 00:58:50

Well, I don't know. I mean, I think that part of it was not having the national organization to be a part of. I think part of it was people were feeling a need to be at least as much focused on the issue-oriented politics that were important to us, and not just doing that within the Democratic Party. I don't know. I mean, I don't think it was a conscious decision. I think that a lot of us were getting drawn in a lot of different directions around progressive politics and around issue-oriented politics, and didn't continue to try to maintain a statewide organization like the Rainbow Coalition. Yeah, I mean, that's what I would point to as the reason, you know.

A lot of us still interact with each other, but not in an organizational way on a statewide level like the Rainbow Coalition, but through other organizations, other activist organizations and coalitions, primarily around specific issues or interrelated issues. But yeah, that just was not maybe a priority after a while. I mean we weren't going to be part of a national movement to try to keep a statewide organization going. I know a lot of us wish we had, but we also look at the work we've been doing since then and accept that we've been still doing the work that represents kind of the foundations of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition.

SAUL 01:00:51

Yeah, and what would you consider to be some of the organization's legacies?

RICK 01:01:00

Well, I think like some of the things I've already said, which is that, you know, I think we broke into the state legislature. The state legislature was an all white male institution up till the mid 80's, and you know, we started getting people that went against that tradition. You know, Rosa Franklin was a Black woman who is an activist leader of the Rainbow Coalition in the Tacoma area, and I'm pretty sure, she was the first Black woman state legislator in the history of the state of Washington. And that came about as a result of the Rainbow Coalition. And that opened up the doors.

There was a candidate, a state legislator, elected also in the late 80's, Cal Anderson, who was not a Jesse Jackson supporter, he was an activist in the Democratic Party, and he was an out gay man who was a leader in the Democratic Party and was open to working with Jesse Jackson supporters and Rainbow Coalition supporters, and was a smart enough and astute enough politician, as well as a gay activist, to recognize that it was important to build coalition with progressive people, even if you didn't support, you know, to the extent that

we did some of the issues. And he got elected to the state legislature, and we supported him. He was the first openly gay person to be elected to the Washington State Legislature, that was also in the late 80's.

And so, I think one important legacy is that it made it feel more possible for people who had historically been disenfranchised from getting elected to office to feel that it was possible that that could happen because there was a widespread level of support for people, not traditional just white male people, to get elected to office. And so I think that was one of the big legacies. That led to the big change that you see today in state government, in the state of Washington, state and local government, is that it's way more diverse, way more representative of the wide range of communities of people who live in the state. It's definitely made the state, you know, recognized around the United States as being, if not the most progressive, one of the most progressive places for people to live and work and engage in politics around the country.

It's, you know, I'm currently doing work on immigrant rights and support for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. And there's a lot of people doing that work trying to make state of Washington feel like a place of refuge and a place of safety for people to come to who are trying to get away from oppressive living conditions in other parts of the world that are primarily the result of US imperialism. And as they enter the United States, they start to hear that one of the best places to go is the state of Washington, to feel safe and to be welcomed. And I think that's a legacy of the work of the Rainbow Coalition. So those are a few of the things I think that developed over the years as a result of the important work that was done in the 80's and early 90's of the Rainbow Coalition.

SAUL 01:04:56

All right. And my last question is, what lessons did you learn in the Rainbow Coalition that can be valuable for today?

RICK 01:05:06

Well, on a personal level, like I said, you know the need to be in a position of power and influence as a white male, I learned pretty clearly very early on in my work with a very diverse progressive political community that I didn't need to, and other people like me didn't need to feel like we had to be in those positions, or that we had to be leaders, or that we knew better than anybody else coming from maybe more privileged backgrounds. And so that was definitely an important lesson that I learned on a personal level and that I integrated into my decisions about my own life and have tried to communicate with friends and colleagues, is that the the pathways and the opportunities and support for and solidarity with people who are historically oppressed and disenfranchised and attempted to be kept out of positions of influence and leadership in this country, that has to not be allowed to continue and be struggled against, on a personal, on a political, on an organizational level.

And then I also in my own professional career as an educator, you know, doing that work as a young person, in my college years in my early 20s, around people of color, around progressive activists from all communities, not just my own immediate sphere of influence showed me, taught me, and embedded in me the importance of supporting and promoting empowerment among young people, especially who come from communities that are disenfranchised, that are not historically allowed to be a part of the decision making power structure in this country. So in my work in schools, I was always a part of groups of educators who promoted youth voice, youth empowerment, youth engagement and leadership, youth awareness of how the political and governmental structures work so that they had the knowledge to put into effect and to be a part of the power making, the power structures of this country in a way that made it way more diverse than it ever was before. And to give young people, especially young people of color, a sense of their value and their importance and the need to have their interests be represented and heard in places where decisions are being made. So that was really a big part

of what I learned from that work and what I incorporated in my own professional work and my own political work going ahead in my life from the Rainbow Coalition work.

SAUL 01:09:04

All right, that concludes this interview. I'm going to go ahead and stop recording.